The Ideals of a Young Lutheran

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The Ideals *of a* Young Lutheran

By Rev. Herman Brueckner, A.M.

Lovingly Dedicated to

The Confirmed Lutheran Youth of America

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IN REMEMBRANCE

To Claire Augustine

From your teacher

L. J. Dierker

CONTENTS

I. My Dear Old Church..... 7

II. My Private Devotions.....15

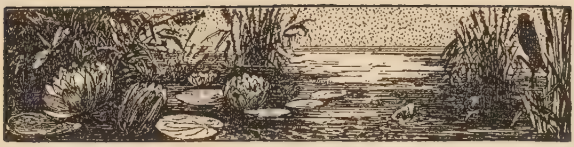
III. My Christian Home.....23

IV. My Special Friends.....31

V. My Personal Habits.....39

VI. My Native Land.....49

VII. My Final Goal.....58



THE IDEALS OF A YOUNG LUTHERAN

I

My Dear Old Church

In early infancy I received the sacrament of Holy Baptism. I then became a member of the holy Christian Church. In this I greatly rejoice. To be a member of Christ's spiritual body, is indeed a blessed privilege. It means that mine is the kingdom of God, with all its spiritual treasures. The Church administers the means of grace, through which I, as well as all true believers, receive forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. That I by faith should have access to these inestimable treasures of the Church, I regard as an unmerited divine favor, for which I must ever be most grateful.

I became a communicant member of the Church at the time of my confirmation, for I am a Lutheran, and in the Lutheran Church it is an established rule that only those shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper who have been duly instructed in the Christian faith and are able to examine themselves as to whether they may receive the blessed Supper worthily. I regard the Lutheran Church as being my only possible choice. It is a special privilege to be a Christian of the Lutheran type. The Lutheran Church has a history of which it may justly feel proud. Its teachings are in strict accord with the Holy Scriptures. Doctrinal purity is one of its chief characteristics. I know this to be true, since I have been instructed in its chief doctrines, as they are contained in Luther's smaller catechism.

When I was confirmed, I promised to be loyal to the Lutheran Church, and with the help of God I shall keep my promise. I shall not, for earthly considerations, become connected with any

other church, but remain loyal to my own. This loyalty, however, means something more than merely holding a certificate of membership in some local Lutheran congregation. I mean to be loyal to my Church, first of all, by holding fast to the pure and unadulterated truth, as it is confessed in the catechism of Luther and in the Augsburg Confession. My endeavor shall be to remain a Lutheran inwardly, by continuing steadfast in the faith of my Church. I shall not content myself with mere lip service, but aim to be a true Lutheran at heart.

As a Lutheran, I shall, wherever I may be, make it a point to attend the public divine services of the Lutheran Church. In fact, I should not feel at home in any other. I want to hear the style of sermon preached by our Lutheran pastors, who stick to their text and do not use it as a springboard from which they dive into a sea of thoughts quite foreign to those of the Scriptures. I want to join in the singing of our good old Lutheran hymns and melodies,

the like of which is not to be found in any of the other churches. I want to take part in the whole liturgical service of my dear Lutheran Church, since it strikes a happy mean between the two extremes of an elaborate formalism as found in the Catholic Church and an absence of all liturgical forms in Protestant churches of the Reformed type.

The Sunday school has become firmly established in my dear Lutheran Church, and I shall regard it as my duty, or rather as my privilege, to attend it regularly far beyond the time of my confirmation. I realize that during the time when I attended catechetical instruction I only learned the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and that I am sorely in need of becoming more intimately acquainted with the teachings of the Bible. If I am asked to assume the duties of an instructor in Sunday school, I shall cheerfully respond to such a request, trusting that God will help me to acquit myself with credit. In teaching others, I shall by thorough preparation profit most my-

self. That will more than reward me for my services.

In addition to the Sunday school, nearly every Lutheran congregation has a Young People's League, partly for devotional, partly for social purposes. I shall become identified with the Young People's League and take a vital interest in its activities. To mingle with other young people of the Lutheran faith, will in itself tend to strengthen my Lutheran consciousness. The devotional meetings of the League will help to foster the inner life of its members, and the papers read at such meetings will widen their outlook upon the Church and its diverse ministrations. The social meetings will provide wholesome entertainment, and help me to resist the temptation of taking part in amusements of a doubtful character. By their combined effort, the Young People's Society can lend financial aid to the congregations in which they exist, as well as to the Church in general. Many a praiseworthy object has been achieved by hearty co-operation

on the part of the young people of the Church as represented in the Young People's League.

Loyalty to my Church would seem to imply that I sing its praises wherever I can find an opportunity to put in a good word for it. Owing to the circumstance that it was built up in this country by immigrants who did not use the English language in their services, it has largely come to be regarded as a foreign church. In reality, its spirit is altogether in accord with American ideals. The strict separation of Church and State, for instance, is consistently advocated by the Lutherans more than by any other class of American citizens. Besides, the descendants of those Lutheran immigrants are rapidly adopting the language of the country, and provision is being made for their spiritual needs by the introduction of the English language in the divine services and in religious instruction. I shall endeavor to make this plain to those who are prejudiced against my Church, and if

they have no other church connections, I shall use my best efforts to get them to join the Church that is my spiritual home, in which I hope to be prepared for entrance into my eternal home in heaven. Philip and Andrew, having found the Christ, were zealous in bringing others to Him. I realize that I have the same duty, and can best fulfill it by inducing the unchurched element in our land to become united with the Church of the pure Word and the Scriptural administration of the Holy Sacraments.

"My Church! my Church! I love my Church,
To Zion's palace beautiful,
Where Christ, the Lord, hath gone.
From all below she bids me go
To Him, the Life, the Way,
The Truth to guide my erring feet
From darkness into day."

II

My Private Devotions

It is of the utmost importance that I should be loyal to my Church and make continuous use of its spiritual ministrations. I fully realize that my inner life is dependent for its nourishment and growth upon regular and faithful church attendance. There is a special blessing to be derived from the diligent hearing of God's Word and from the practice of Christian fellowship in the public divine services. Jesus Himself must have felt a craving for that spiritual enrichment which results from congregational worship in the house of God. We find Him habitually visiting the synagogues and the temple, where the people gathered to give public expression to their religious life, and to receive new inspiration for the inner man, such as can not be obtained in any other way.

However, religion is not only a matter of public worship; I must also be conscientious about keeping up my private devotions. There are times when the soul in blissful stillness alone with God would dwell. Prayer is something that must be cultivated in the privacy of one's own room no less than in public at the house of God. Jesus censured the Pharisees for making a public display of their religion by praying at the street corners and in the synagogues, where they could be seen of men. He admonishes me to pray in secret, resting assured that my Heavenly Father will reward me openly and thus demonstrate my being in favor with Him. In this respect also, Jesus Himself practiced what He preached. After He had fed the five thousand, He went up into a mountain and spent the major part of the night in prayerful communion with His Heavenly Father. In the garden of Gethsemane He separated Himself from His disciples, even from the three whom He had taken with Him into the garden to witness His spiritual conflict,

before He wrestled with His Heavenly Father in prayer, thus doing what had been foreshadowed in days of yore, when Jacob contended with the Lord, being quite alone with Him.

There are certain crises in life when the soul must be alone with God, when the presence of others would be felt as an unwarranted intrusion upon its privacy. I must at times be free to pour out my heart before God without reserve. There are things that I want to talk over with God alone, wrestling with Him as Jacob did, and not letting go of Him until He has blessed me, until I have found peace and rest for my soul.

In its deepest aspects, religion is not so much of a social as of a private nature. It has to do with the relation of the individual soul to its God and Savior. Public worship is bound to be cold and formalistic where the Christians are neglectful in their private devotions. Only when a lot of live coals are bunched together, will there be a flame to ascend heavenward. The ur-

gency of private devotions is thus made manifest. Hence, for my own sake, as well as for the sake of the Church, I shall make it a practice to devote a part of each day to private communion with God in prayer.

If others pay no attention to this side of the religious life, their bad example must not dissuade me from pursuing the straight and narrow path. Rather must I follow in the steps of those who are known to have prayed most diligently in the secret of their chamber, with the door closed to intruders. Luther was a man of this type. After he had retired to his private room, he loved to stand at the open window and look up to the starry heavens as he spoke his evening prayers. One of his maxims was, "Fleissig gebetet, ist ueber die Haelfte studiert." Diligent prayer, he contended, is half the battle. It was that with him at the Diet of Worms. Before giving his final answer to the question as to whether he would recant his writings and teachings, he asked for a day's respite, and

this he spent mostly in prayer, as we are informed by those who stood close to him and even had a chance to hear him pray, without his being aware of the fact.

I sometimes find that my mind is in a state of distraction, unable to express what I think and feel in my heart. Here is where the use of religious manuals does me excellent service. The Bible itself is a religious manual that can not be equalled. What a wealth of expression for the inner life of the soul is to be found in the Psalms of the Old Testament! They meet every condition and every need. The 130th Psalm is available for my crying unto the Lord out of the depths, and the 103rd Psalm lends itself to the expression of those joyful emotions that move my soul when it reflects on the loving kindness that God has shown unto me. My hymn book also comes in handy in my private devotions. It gives vent to practically every phase of religious experience, and many of its hymns are prayers even in form. And I make it a point to read

a prayer every morning, as well as every evening, from one of the many devotional books published by my Church.

Last, but not least, I always repeat the prayers that my mother taught me in early infancy. They are part and parcel of my very life. I would not dispense with them for anything in the world. I know there are people who discourage the repetition of formulated prayers because one is so apt to repeat them automatically, without putting any thought and feeling into them. Such vain repetitions are indeed an abomination, and one must guard against them. But the abuse of a thing does not warrant the discontinuance of its correct and proper use. Otherwise we could not even use the Lord's Prayer, which has become the Common Prayer of all churches, including those who call themselves non-liturgical. As a matter of fact, Jesus availed Himself of fixed prayer forms during the darkest hours of His life. Among the seven sayings on the cross there are two which He borrowed from the Old Testa-

ment Psalms. What a comfort always to be able to turn to Jesus for counsel and guidance! In His private devotions, as in every other respect, He has given me an example that I should follow in His steps. And this I shall do with His help.

"Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!"

III

My Christian Home

The home is a sacred relic of Paradise, a veritable tabernacle of God among men. I take pleasure in joining the hosts of those who have sung its praises. I am thoroughly in accord with the familiar words of the poet who says that there is no place like home. The home atmosphere is unique. Nothing can replace it. What a world of meaning attaches to the common saying that one feels "at home" in a certain environment! It means an absence of discomfort, a sense of congeniality, and appreciation of the fact that one is among kindred spirits, among people who know him and to whom he is known. In the home circle one need not exercise any painful restraint, but may express himself freely, without fearing that his words will be misconstrued and wrongly quoted to his detriment.

Perhaps it is true that, as a German philosopher has said, one is not able to gain a full and adequate conception of home until he has been away from home for a time and has experienced that strange feeling commonly known as homesickness. Think, for instance, of a young man who looks for happiness away from home. He imagines that being without parental restraint will bring him the realization of his fondest ideal. But how soon he finds himself disillusioned and begins to long for home! An irresistible desire to be with his own takes possession of him. So he returns to his parental roof. Again he sits "with his feet under his mother's table," and for the first time in his life he fully understands the meaning of home.

The highest ideal of a home is one pervaded and dominated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Such a home is blessed beyond compare. The poet Spitta truthfully says:

"O blessed home that cheerfully receiveth
Thy visits, Jesus Christ, the Soul's true Friend,

That far above all others guests, believeth
It must to Thee its warmest cheer extend;
Where every heart to Thee is fondly turning,
Where every eye for Thee with pleasure speaks,
Where all to know Thy will are truly yearning,
And every one to do it promptly seeks."

It means something to have been born and bred in a Christian home, in a home ruled and governed by the Spirit of Jesus. I am thankful to say that mine was and is such a home. My parents gave me to God in Holy Baptism when I was still in my earliest infancy. They remembered me in their prayers and also taught me to pray as soon as my lips could give utterance to intelligible speech. To them I owe my Christian education and training. Through them God has bestowed upon me uncounted blessings both temporal and spiritual.

May I ever regard my parents as the most precious gift of God. May I fulfill toward them the Fourth Commandment, the first one that has a blessed promise attached to it. May I honor, serve, obey, love and esteem

them. May I, in this respect also, follow the example of Jesus, who was subject unto His parents and behaved toward them as a dutiful son, thus winning the pleasure of His Father in heaven, as well as the good will of the people among whom He moved in the days of His childhood. Nor did He forget His mother when He had reached the age of maturity. She accompanied Him to Capernaum, where He resided during His public ministry, and He doubtless saw to it that she was not lacking in that which belongs to the want and support of this present life. When He was nailed to the cross, one of the last things that He did was to remember His mother by committing her to the tender care of the disciple whom He loved.

In the natural order of things, the different inmates of a home can not remain together. As the birdlings leave the parental nest when they are able to fly and to look for their own food, so the children of a family become scattered to the four winds when they are

able to "shift for themselves." But it is not necessary that they should for this reason forget their parents, brothers and sisters. I realize that I owe it to my parents, as well as to all my family relations, not only to remember them in thought, but also to give them an occasional token of remembrance in the form of a letter, a Christmas present, or a birthday gift. Thus are the home fires kept burning. The tie of love remains intact. The family spirit is nurtured and strengthened to the blessing of all concerned.

We are living in a time when family life seems to be on the wane. The home has in many instances become merely a place where the different members of the family eat and sleep. Their work, their companions, their entertainment, all this is sought and found outside of the home. I shall use my influence to strengthen family ties wherever I can. Thus I shall be rendering valuable service both to the Church and to the State. The home is the nursery in which the children, the

hope of the Church, are nurtured and trained like tender trees, to bear the fruits of righteousness. The family is the social unit, and no state can dispense with the wholesome influences that emanate from the home. Faithful church members and patriotic citizens usually spring from Christian homes, as may be shown by the example of some of our greatest men and women. Not a few of our presidents were born and reared in parsonages.

The time may come when I shall have a home of my own. I shall endeavor to make it a Christian home, with morning and evening devotions, with prayer before and after meals, with an atmosphere in which the virile Christian virtues can thrive abundantly. Since I am a Christian, I should not be true to my ideals if I failed to foster in my home a Christian spirit and cultivate the Christian virtues. Nor should I be a true Lutheran if I did not put forth every effort in the direction of realizing the Christian ideal of a home. Luther himself had a home

in which the Christian ideal came to a beautiful realization. He has endeared himself to us by his exemplary family life as much as by his work as a reformer. In fact, his reformatory work included the founding of the Lutheran parsonage. How we love to think of the great reformer as a happy husband and father, seated in the midst of his family, making melody together with them unto the Lord, as was his custom!

May God help me to realize the Lutheran ideal of a Christian home. May my family relations ever conform to the splendid example given me and all Lutherans by Luther himself, the devoted son, the faithful husband and the dutiful father, finding true domestic happiness in his ideal family relations.

"O blest the house, whate'er befall,
Where Jesus Christ is all in all;
Yea, if He were not dwelling there,
How poor, and dark, and void it were!

O blest that house where faith ye find,
And all within have set their mind
To trust their God and serve Him still,
And do in all His holy will."

IV

My Special Friends

While my family relations should always be of a friendly nature, I may have friends also among those with whom I am not related through bonds of blood or heredity. There is a certain kinship of spirits which often furnishes the basis for a relation far more intimate than that which results from family ties. Solomon speaks of a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The Lord Jesus Himself placed this spiritual relationship above that which exists between members of the same family. Many of His immediate relatives did not believe in Him, and He felt much more closely attached to His disciples, who had faith in Him and by whom He was both understood and appreciated. Moreover, we know that among His disciples there was one whom He loved in a special way. St. John is fond of designating himself as the disciple

whom Jesus loved, loved in a special way, with a tenderness and intimacy and delicacy of understanding that was quite in excess of any feeling of attachment He felt for the other members of His little group. When it is said that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, we have reason to infer that Jesus and the members of that family in Bethany stood on very intimate terms with one another, that they cherished for one another a special feeling of esteem and affection, that their mutual confidence brought them nearer to one another than to those outside of their circle.

Sometimes two persons who are far removed from each other in their social relations are brought together in such a way that the most tender and intimate friendship is established between them. This may be seen in the case of David and Jonathan. The one was the son of a shepherd, the other was of royal parentage. But David, the shepherd's son, had qualities of mind and heart which strongly appealed to Jona-

than, the son of Saul, chosen to rule over Israel. There was a high and heroic spirit in David which Jonathan could not but deeply admire. David had slain the giant Goliath, thus accomplishing what no other man in the whole army of Saul was brave enough even to attempt. In the eyes of Jonathan David was a hero in the true sense of the word, and he both admired and loved him. David, in turn, reciprocated most heartily, and the two formed a regular covenant of friendship, promising each other to be mutually faithful throughout life. Although Jonathan knew that David would be king of Israel some day, he was not jealous of him, but in a spirit of generosity went with him through thick and thin, defending him in every way when David was in danger of falling a victim to the jealousy and hatred of Saul, the father of Jonathan. And when Jonathan had been slain in the battle of Gilboa, David gave eloquent expression to the sincere grief that he felt over the loss of his bosom friend.

While the friendship existing between David and Jonathan may have been quite unique, reaching a beauty and height of idealism that is rarely attained, this is no reason why others should not aspire to the development of relationships bearing at least a similarity to the ideal friendship which existed between those two noble men. We can not be fully satisfied with being on friendly terms with people in general. The human heart feels the need of deeper attachments, based on mutual respect, esteem, love, and confidence. I want personal friends to whom I may open my heart, with whom I may share my joys and my sorrows, with whom I can discuss my trials and tribulations, to whom I may turn for sympathy in times of trouble, who will lend me encouragement when I am most in need of it. My circle of friends does not need to be large. It is even doubtful whether one can have many friends for whom he cherishes the same degree of fondness, to whom he feels drawn with the same irresistible force. But I can

not bear the thought of being friendless. I must have at least one good friend who deserves my confidence, and whom I may trust not to betray me.

That a base betrayal of confidence is possible, must be taken for granted. History furnishes many examples in point. What treachery was experienced by David, may be inferred from the forty-first Psalm, in which he gives vent to the doleful complaint, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." The same complaint might have been voiced by Jesus, the Son of David according to the flesh. Judas betrayed Jesus, who addressed him as "friend" even after he had given Him the shameful kiss of betrayal. The unwavering love of the Master makes the treachery of the disciple appear all the more heinous and contemptible. But such instances must not lead us to become pessimistic and regard loyal friendship as being quite out of the question. Better to be betrayed once in a while than to mistrust

everybody and lead the life of a recluse, keeping aloof from all others, refusing to place confidence in anyone, being altogether distrustful, always divining that someone is trying to take advantage of you. People who mistrust everybody else are often least trustworthy themselves.

Still, a certain measure of caution is necessary in the choice of one's friends. For one thing, I know from the Bible that we should not form covenants of friendship with wicked people. "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." The endeavor to please my friends might prompt me to adopt some of their ungodly ways and customs. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Many a young person has been led astray by the friends with whom he chose to associate. It is not the part of wisdom to choose one's friends from the circle of those who are at enmity with God. I can not afford to lose the friendship of God in order to gain and retain the friendship of the world. Well may

I heed the warning of St. James: "Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Discretion is the better part of valor, and it is the part of discretion to cultivate intimate friendship only with those who are morally and religiously sound. The subtle influence of an infidel friend may endanger my soul and rob me of my most treasured heritage, which is my faith in my God and in my Savior.

Nor must I ever forget that Jesus is my truest Friend. My love for Him must not be impaired by the love I entertain for others, or I would not be worthy of Him. While in the case even of my most personal friends there is a possibility of my being betrayed or at least forsaken by them in the hour when I most need their help and sympathy, no such a possibility exists in the case of Jesus; it is beyond the shadow of a doubt that He will be faithful to me throughout all the ups and downs of this life. "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Jesus is such a friend. "He never will forsake in need the soul

that trusts in Him indeed." So I pledge myself to Him above all others. It shall be my sincere confession:

"Men like a cradle sway and falter,
But Jesus like a rock doth stand;
Though storms of woe my fortune alter,
He holds me firmly by the hand.
Yea, He stands by me to the end;
I trust Him as my truest Friend."

V

My Personal Habits

All sentient creatures are born with a set of instincts. They do certain things without being obliged to learn how to do them. The following instinct in the case of little geese, ducks and chickens is an example in point. An interesting thing is the complete loss of this instinct unless it is immediately exercised. By training an instinctive tendency in a certain direction, it may be modified to such an extent as to make it appear as something altogether new and different. The hunger instinct is something very primitive in the case of a savage. It prompts him to go in search of food and to partake of it until his appetite is satisfied. But the way he goes about this is something very crude as compared with modern food production and with the refined table manners of civilized people.

There is a certain kinship between instincts and habits. When habits have become deeply ingrained, they function much the same as instincts, requiring comparatively little voluntary effort when exercised. A habit may have an instinctive basis and be nothing more than a primitive instinct carried to a higher plane of efficiency. But while instincts, in their crudest form, are inborn, habits must be acquired. They are formed mainly by frequent repetition. After we have repeated an act again and again, we perform it habitually, without putting forth any appreciable amount of mental effort. Habits thus mean a saving of energy. Hence, the more good habits we acquire, the better it will be for us, the more easily we will perform our daily duties.

Habits are most readily formed in the days of one's youth, while the mind is still in a state of plasticity. As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined. The mental and bodily habits that we acquire in youth are also those which tend

to persevere more than those formed in later years. For this reason, it is important that I, being still in the formative period of life, should avoid the cultivation of evil habits and put myself to the task of forming habits good and commendable. What we call education and training, is largely a process of habit formation. One's personality and character are determined by the kind of habits which he has acquired.

After habits have been thoroughly formed, they tend to persist. It is an exceedingly difficult matter to break up a bad habit. Men and women who have acquired the opium habit find it next to impossible to break away from it. The same thing may be said of the drink habit. People who are addicted to this habit seldom get rid of it entirely. The temptation to revert to it is ever present. Smoking may easily become a bad habit, just as playing cards may be done to excess. Boys who acquire the habit of smoking cigarettes will frequently become slaves to this

objectionable habit and by its excessive indulgence ruin themselves physically as well as morally. How important, therefore, to avoid the formation of habits that are bad or at least objectionable.

A habit which has become widely spread among our young people is that of using profane language. They try to give zest to their speech by inserting a profane word or phrase every now and then. When taken to task for it, they often try to excuse themselves by saying that they do not mean anything by it, that it is merely a habit with them. But that is no excuse. On the contrary, a practice is all the worse for having become a deeply ingrained habit. What would you say of one who steals, lies or murders because it has become a habit with him to indulge in these things? A habitual liar, thief or man-slayer is a criminal of the very worst type. If anyone uses profane language from force of habit, it simply shows that he is a slave to this vice. So I shall be on my guard against the use

of profane language, and make it my business to cure others of this most sinful habit.

There are those who have formed the habit of letting their minds dwell on things impure. And out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. Such people can hardly open their mouths without giving vent to something that is vile and indecent. When they tell a joke, it is generally of the impure and suggestive type. Their indecent stories bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of all decent people. I shall avoid lending my ear to such stories. I shall much less use my own vocal organs in giving utterance to such vile speech. I shall endeavor to let my thoughts run in the opposite channels, dwelling on things that are pure, lovely and of good report. In my speech also I shall aim to be chaste and pure.

If evil and objectionable habits are to be avoided, it follows that good and commendable habits should be zealously cultivated. Happily, man is so constituted that the number of habits he

can form is practically unlimited. While this capacity may be abused by the formation of evil habits, why should I not use it in the right way by forming and cultivating habits of the opposite type?

Punctuality is a virtue which one may practice habitually. I can form the habit of being on time just as well as I am able to form the habit of being late on practically every occasion, late for church, late for Sunday school, late for my meals, late in coming home and going to bed at night. Punctuality is half of life. One who has formed the habit of always being on time has a decided advantage over one who is never known to be on time, but always lags behind. A punctual person is a joy forever. I shall endeavor always to be either Johnnie or Jennie on the spot.

Cleanliness is next to godliness. I shall make it a point to be neat and tidy about my person. If I am not able to buy costly garments, I can at least dress in such a way as to appear neat and trim. A boy once "landed a job" because it was noticed that his shoes

were polished, his clothes brushed, his finger nails trimmed and his whole appearance such as to reflect his passion for cleanliness. Filth is never commendable, whether it appear in one's speech or in one's wearing apparel. I shall try to appear neat and clean always.

Politeness is to do and say the kindest things in the kindest way. One may be polite without running the danger of becoming a mere fop. Good manners are a decided asset to anyone. Thus, if one asks his fellowman a polite question, he will nearly always receive a polite answer. A favor asked in a polite way, will be cheerfully rendered. I shall cultivate the habit of being polite to everyone, not excepting my immediate relatives. Politeness practiced at home will most naturally appear in public.

Our minister says that going to church should be something more than a mere habit, but it is a good habit, which one should cultivate. Jesus Himself went to the synagogue at

Nazareth on the Sabbath, "as was His custom" (habit). It goes without saying that the practice of my religion must not degenerate into a dead habit, but it will be a great help to anyone if he forms the habit of going to church regularly. This habit will at least keep him under the sound of God's Word, and the latter will not remain without its good effect upon his inner life.

The Savior's example teaches me that I should form the habit of prayer. He prayed often and, at times, several hours. My prayer should not, of course, be a formality performed in a perfunctory manner at stated times and according to a stated rote, but I shall derive much benefit, as the promises of God teach me, if I am constant in prayer. May God's Spirit teach me how to pray.

Generally speaking we should make our habits, not our tyrannical masters, but our helpful servants. Above all, may I ever bear in mind that God's grace alone can give me strength to break away from all bad and harmful

habits, and to cultivate those virtues which a Christian will exhibit. The love of Jesus who loved me even unto death is ever before my soul when I partake of the Lord's Supper or use the Gospel. His love will fill me at all times with that power that I need to conquer sin and to lead a godly life. May the Holy Spirit, therefore, prompt me to make diligent and sincere use of the means of grace, the holy Gospel and the Sacraments. May my own personal habits serve me in the endeavor to grow in favor with God and man, as did the Savior.

"Christ, of holiness the Fountain,
As crystal waters from the mountain,
So doth Thy saving grace descend.
All the cherubim in glory,
All seraphim of sacred story
Compared to Thee no brightness lend.
Wilt Thou my model be
And mould me after Thee,
Blessed Savior!
With purpose true, help me to do
Thy holy will each day anew."

VI

My Native Land

America is my native land. It may not be the land where my fathers died. There are millions of people living in America whose forefathers lived and died in the land of the Rhine, or in the land of the midnight sun. But they are good and patriotic American citizens. No American who can trace his ancestry back to the Pilgrim Fathers can claim superior patriotism on that score. If he has nothing else in which to glory, his glorying is not good. The Jews took no little pride in being able to say, "Abraham is our father." But Jesus questioned their right to claim any superiority because they happened to be the bodily descendants of that venerable patriarch. Said He, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." A good American is one who by his life and conduct advo-

cates the true American ideals. In this sense, I shall endeavor to show myself worthy of holding citizenship here in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

To have been born and bred in America, to have become imbued with the true American spirit from childhood up, is something of which one may justly speak as a rare privilege. Ours is surely a great and wonderful land. To reflect on the vastness of its territory, on the diversity of its products, on the wealth of its natural resources, on the scenic beauty of its wooded hills and snow-capped mountains, on the charm of its rivers and valleys, on the sweet music of its murmuring brooks and rills, on the birds that sing in our trees and the scaly inmates of the lakes that dot our country, fills my heart with a sense of wonder, admiration and rapture. America has fitly been designated as the land of unlimited possibilities. In the comparatively short period of its history, it has been marvelously developed along practically all lines of

human activity. Its waving fields of grain, its teeming cities and factories, its temples of commerce and finance, its halls of legislation and courts of justice, its common schools and higher institutions of learning, its towered churches and magnificent cathedrals, all these things have come as if by magic. If our country develops in the future as it has in the past, its possibilities fairly stagger one's imagination.

As Americans, we are thankful for the civic and religious liberty which we enjoy. Ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. There are no ruling dynasties in America. The people elect the men whom they want to conduct the governmental affairs of their country. With us, a public office is a public trust, and any officer who abuses the confidence of the people may be speedily put out of office, or at least has very limited chances of being re-elected. Our Constitution provides for a wise separation of Church and State. The State

may not interfere with our right to worship God in accordance with the dictates of our own conscience. But it protects the property rights of the Church and encourages its work by exempting its churches, schools, colleges, seminaries and other institutions from taxation. The Church, in turn, benefits the State by educating its citizens along religious lines, teaching them principles of obedience to law and patriotic love for their country and its free institutions. The moulding of a sound public opinion rests largely with the Church, and is of indispensable help to the State in the prevention of vice and crime.

As an American citizen, I have certain inalienable rights, such as the protection of my life and property, but every right involves a duty. I am in duty bound to obey the laws of my country and to rally to its standards in time of war. I am under obligation to fight the internal no less than the external enemies of my country. I must not prove guilty of participating in

anarchistic uprisings, or of accepting bribes intended to influence me in casting my ballot. If I have the necessary qualifications, I should not refuse to assume the responsibility of holding an office, be it in the state or in the community. One of the reasons why there is so much political corruption in this fair land of ours may be found in the unwillingness of so many good and capable men and women to run for any political office. If I can not hold an office for any valid reasons, I can at least vote for those candidates whom I consider best qualified to be entrusted with any office to which they aspire.

It may be somewhat humiliating to make the admission, but Lutherans have, as a class, taken altogether too little interest in the public affairs of this country. We like to speak of Muehlenberg and his illustrious sons, who took such a noble part in shaping the early history of our country and its free institutions. We think with considerable pride of the proportionally large Lutheran contingent to the armies and

navies that have fought our battles on land and sea. But we feel somewhat humiliated when we consider the comparatively small number of Lutherans that are to be found in our state legislatures or in the national congress. The flood of immigration brought to our hospitable shores millions of staunch Lutherans who have helped to convert the primeval forests and the barren prairies of this land into veritable gardens of the Lord. The Germans have done more than their share in developing the natural resources of Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Iowa and other states. The Scandinavians have made Minnesota bloom like the plain of Sharon. Lutherans make good business men and they may be found in responsible positions that require rugged honesty and steadfast devotion to duty, such as the sons of Luther possess. But they have no political aspirations, generally speaking.

A change for the better may, however, be confidently expected. We are having Lutheran governors in such states as the Dakotas and Minnesota.

Lutherans are also being elected to congress, though in rare instances. Our young Lutherans are enjoying better educational advantages than their German and Scandinavian ancestors, inasmuch as they have full command of the English language and not a few of them are receiving instructions at our denominational and state colleges. That will tend to bring them into the public limelight. They will be called upon to make use of their exceptional qualifications by assuming the responsibilities of public offices in the state and in the community. I shall not be hindered by a false sense of modesty from accepting any office to which my people may elect me. I shall appreciate their confidence and conscientiously do my duty.

As Lutherans, we have to make our contribution toward the welfare of our country, not only by praying for its president, its governors, its judges and its magistrates, but also by assuming the duties and responsibilities of leadership. The Catholic Church and the

various Reformed Churches are largely dominated by a legalistic spirit. They want to improve social conditions by legal methods, such as the enactment of prohibitory laws, the curtailment of religious freedom, and the like. They are always trying to assert their influence in politics. Our Lutheran Church is opposed to all political propaganda on the part of religious corporations. But it would seem to be our plain duty to counteract, as much as possible, this legalistic spirit that is abroad in our land, and that threatens to change the very character of our country, as an asylum for the oppressed of other nations. It is for us to stand in those liberties which are in truth, American, and to inject as much as possible of our sound Lutheran ethics into the American type of public morality.

In conclusion, I realize that my country needs me at all times, when it is living up to its ideals, as well as when it is in danger of losing sight of them. The slogan has been given out, "My country, right or wrong!" I ac-

cept it in the following form: "My country, right or wrong: if right, to keep it right; if wrong, to put it right."

"My native country, thee,
Land of the noble, free,
Thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.

Our father's God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King."

VII

My Final Goal

"Here have we no continuing city." Jerusalem was not destined to remain forever the religious center of God's chosen people. According to the doleful prophecy of Jesus, it came to its destruction. The Romans laid siege to the holy city for over a year. During this time they succeeded in making numerous breaches in the mighty walls of the city. Through these breaches the soldiers entered when the command was given to take the city by storm. The infuriated soldiers mercilessly slaughtered men, women, and children. They laid the torch to the houses within the city, thus enveloping it in one great cloud of smoke and flames. The beautiful temple also was burned to ashes. The walls of the city were sacked in so thorough a manner as not to leave one

stone on top of another. The inhabitants of the destroyed city, or as many of them as had survived the terrible catastrophe, were scattered to the four winds. Not a few of them were compelled to serve as galley slaves, thus losing their personal liberty in addition to the civil liberty of which they had previously been deprived.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews therefore had every reason to reprove the Christians of Hebrew extraction for still clinging to the earthly Jerusalem with all the tendrils of their hearts, after they had become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though it had been the religious, as well as the political center of the Israelites ever since the days of King David, though its magnificent temple surpassed all others in the beauty of its architecture and in the lavish wealth of its equipment, though hundreds of priests in gorgeous attire served in that splendid house of worship, though a choir of many voices rendered inspiring music and helped to elevate the divine serv-

ices by making a joyful noise unto the Lord, though nothing was left undone that tended to make its appeal to the religious sensibilities of the people who came to the holy city in long caravans, especially when some noted festival was approaching, in order to participate in the elaborate services conducted in the courts of the Lord, all this could not forestall the doom that was impending. Jerusalem was indeed no continuing city.

One can not help thinking of other ancient cities which flourished in days of yore, but which like Jerusalem were doomed to pass out of existence. Babylon, erected by King Nebuchadnezzar as a monument to his power and glory, was reduced to a heap of ruins, which have but recently been unearthed, to bear testimony of its vanished glory and vaunted civilization. Nineveh, which in the days of the prophet Jonah was graciously spared from destruction because its inhabitants repented of their sins in sack-cloth and ashes, also came to its destruction at a later time,

and its ruins were hidden beneath the dust of the earth for many centuries, until recent excavations laid them bare and gave evidence of its former culture and progress along the various lines of human endeavor. Memphis, Palmyra, Thebes, Persepolis, Troy and other cities of antiquity have likewise vanished from the earth, so that the glory of their achievements lives only in the records of the historians and in the songs of the poets.

There are any number of famous cities which at the present time dot the earth in both of its hemispheres. Some of them have existed for many centuries, and may continue to exist for many more. But sooner or later every one of them will meet the fate of their predecessors.

"Though royal cities tower
In strength and precious gold,
They vanish like a flower,
And soon their fall is told."

And if any of them should see countless generations come and go, this very

fact would only accentuate the truth that none of them offers me a permanent place of abode. In this world I am but a pilgrim and a stranger. My true and abiding city is not to be found here on earth.

"O where is the home of the soul to be found?
Who knows its true shelter where comforts abound?
What city of refuge will offer a place
That sin can not enter the soul to disgrace?
Nowhere, nowhere do we behold
On earth such a city of blessings untold."

I do not lament the evident fact that we have here no continuing city, no permanent place of abode. Despite the many blessings that I am privileged to enjoy, I realize that the curse of God is still resting upon this earth, and that life here below is fraught with innumerable ills. "The days of our years are three score and ten, and if by reason of strength they be four score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Hence,

"I would not live alway, I ask not to stay
Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way;
The few lurid mornings that dawn on us here
Are enough for life's woes, full enough for its cheer."

It is for me to rejoice that the day is approaching when I shall find my permanent home in the Jerusalem that is above, and that is the mother of us all. "We have here no continuing city, **but we seek one to come.**" This does not mean that we are hopefully looking forward to a time when an abiding city will come into existence here in this transient world. That city which is to come, and which we as Christians seek in the sense of ardently desiring and striving for it, is Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest, Jerusalem with its streets of gold and its gates of pearl. It is the city of God

"Where the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet,
While anthems of rapture unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."

There can be no higher ideal than that of being finally received into that heavenly city, free from sin and sorrow, at home with the Lord, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Millions of God's children have aspired to reach that heavenly goal, and are already numbered with the blest. I am but one in an endless caravan headed for the city that is to come, for the land that is fairer than day. May I not grow weary on the way. May I be given strength to continue steadfast to the end. May I without faltering press forward to my final goal, and by the grace of God realize my highest ideal, eternal life in that abiding city on high.

"Mid the lilies blooming yonder
Thou shalt wander,
O my soul, and be at home.
Rise, then, as on eagle pinions,
Thy dominions are above where angels roam."

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